

South Dakota National Guard

Public Affairs Office

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

May 12, 2017

SD National Guard aviators prepare for upcoming fire season

By Sgt. Austin Pearce – SDNG Public Affairs Office

HOT SPRINGS, S.D. – Soldiers of Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, South Dakota Army National Guard, reinforced their wildland firefighting readiness near Hot Springs, May 4-5.

Helicopter flight crews of the 189th certify annually with the South Dakota Wildland Fire Division in order to provide aerial water suppression assistance when wildland fires develop.

Without the certification, the 189th could not provide aid to civilian agencies who normally do not have aviation support during a fire.

“This is the annual recertification for National Guard pilots so they’re authorized to fly over federal lands to assist in wildland fire suppression,” said Joannah Tornow, South Dakota Wildland Fire Division public information officer. “The National Guard helps us tremendously. We need their help and this training is good for both of us because we get to train on the ground and learn how to communicate and work effectively with the pilots.”

The 189th trained for two days with the wildland fire division to earn their recertification, which consisted of both classroom and real-life exercises.

“We have a day of academics in the classroom where we talk about everything from fire activity to natural firefighting techniques that normal firefighters on the ground learn and do,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matt Reindl, a medevac pilot for the 189th. “The next day we came out and applied everything we learned into actual training and got hands-on by dipping water and dumping it on certain spots within a fire zone.”

When the state needs aviation resources for wildland fire suppression, the assistance of the SDARNG is vital for their success in real-life scenarios.

“Since the state doesn’t own any (aviation firefighting) resources, we couldn’t complete our mission without the National Guard,” said Tornow.

“It’s important for us to be on the same page and to have a good relationship with every organization involved,” said Reindl. “It makes the operation run a lot smoother if everybody’s on the same page, does the same training and is aware and conscious of the same practices.”

Working with multiple organizations is also beneficial for improving communication procedures for the 189th as they continue to prepare for their October deployment to Kuwait.

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“When you’re in a deployed setting, there’s always someone talking in your ear when you’re flying the aircraft,” said Reindl. “You have to be focused on the task you’re doing, plus you have to have your head in other places too. It’s critical that you’re paying attention and hearing the right stuff in order to keep everybody safe.”

Fire season in South Dakota typically runs from June to October, but the season can extend depending on the weather from the previous winter and upcoming fall.

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



170505-Z-TW084-0023: Members of Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, South Dakota Army National Guard, conduct annual wildland fire certification with the South Dakota Wildland Fire Division near Hot Springs, S.D., May 5, 2017. The annual training recertifies 189th flight crews to assist the South Dakota Wildland Fire Division during real-life scenarios. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Austin Pearce)



170505-Z-TW084-0032: Members of Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, South Dakota Army National Guard, conduct annual wildland fire certification with the South Dakota Wildland Fire Division near Hot Springs, S.D., May 5, 2017. The annual training recertifies 189th flight crews to assist the South Dakota Wildland Fire Division during real-life scenarios. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Austin Pearce)



170505-Z-TW084-0036: Members of Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, South Dakota Army National Guard, conduct annual wildland fire certification with the South Dakota Wildland Fire Division near Hot Springs, S.D., May 5, 2017. The annual training recertifies 189th flight crews to assist the South Dakota Wildland Fire Division during real-life scenarios. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Austin Pearce)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact the SDNG Public Affairs Office at (605) 737-6721 or e-mail ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil